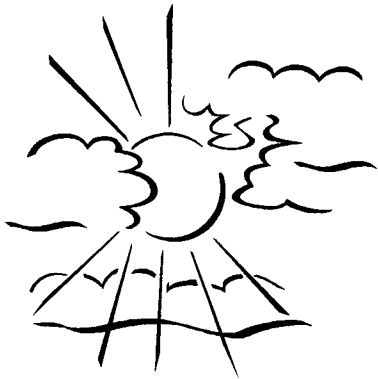


***Department
of
Human
Services***

**Prepared by the
DHS Office of
Communications
(517) 373-7394**



Articles in Today's Clips

Thursday, December 15, 2005

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

TOPIC	PAGE
*Welfare Reform	2-14
*Unemployment	15-19
Child Abuse/Neglect/Protection	20-27
Juvenile Justice	28-29
Health Care	30-32
Domestic Violence	33
Charities	34-43
Right-to-Work	44
State Employees	45

***Important story at this spot**

Granholt plans veto of new welfare rules

Bill would impose 4-year lifetime limit

December 15, 2005

BY CHRIS CHRISTOFF
FREE PRESS LANSING BUREAU CHIEF

Gov. Jennifer Granholm will veto new welfare rules passed by the Legislature that would place a strict, lifetime 4-year limit on welfare for families, her spokeswoman, Liz Boyd, said Wednesday.

Boyd said the lifetime limit on welfare does not allow exceptions for people who are simply unemployable, or those who are working and going to school but don't earn enough to be self-sufficient.

Boyd said a strict cutoff would jeopardize an estimated 36,000 children who are eligible for welfare but might lose it because their parents don't comply with the new rules. Public assistance is generally available to families with children, and not for single, able-bodied adults.

The Legislature passed the welfare bill late Tuesday night.

"The governor has concern over the vulnerable who have played by the rules and do not have the skills to pull themselves out of dire poverty," Boyd said.

"To jeopardize assistance to children is irresponsible, it amounts to playing a game of chicken with people's lives."

The bill would require those on welfare for 3 years to find work or job training that would make them self-sufficient within one year.

The changes also would suspend welfare benefits for recipients who don't comply with work or school requirements. Also, federal Social Security benefits for disabled recipients would be deducted from their state welfare checks.

A problem Granholm faces with a veto is that current work rules for welfare recipients are to expire Dec. 31. That would leave many recipients who are not exempt from welfare work rules scrambling to find jobs in Michigan's weak economy.

Boyd said Granholm will urge the Legislature to extend the current rules when they return Dec. 28.

Matt Resch, spokesman for House Republicans, said an extension is possible.

He noted that Granholm earlier had said she supported a 48-month limit on welfare, although she later said the limit should allow exceptions.

Contact **CHRIS CHRISTOFF** at 517-372-8660 or christoff@freepress.com.

VETO OF WELFARE BILLS COULD AFFECT CHILDREN, ELDERLY

Governor Jennifer Granholm will veto a package of welfare reform bills sent to her by the Legislature early Wednesday, meaning that unless the chambers return to extend certain provisions that sunset at the end of the year, possibly a laundry list of people deferred from Work First, such as children, senior citizens, or those caring for relatives with disabilities, could lose that status.

While the Department of Human Services most likely will maintain those people on deferment, and cash assistance will continue, another provision on 30-day sanctions also could be technically lost by a veto from the governor. The House took no action Tuesday and Wednesday morning on SB 757, which would extend the current sunset on the state's welfare system to December 31, 2006.

Officials from both departments met Wednesday to discuss the "what ifs" of the situation and said that for now, there does not seem to be a direct impact on assistance to those within the system.

Granholm press secretary Liz Boyd said the welfare bills are "headed for a veto. The governor was clear about her concern regarding the vulnerable population and she can't sign legislation that hurts people who need skills to pull themselves up from poverty and are playing by the rules. It's a game of chicken with people's lives."

Ms. Boyd said the administration hopes the House will deal with the Senate-passed bill extending the sunset when it returns for sine die adjournment, a day that traditionally is largely ceremonial with few members in attendance. "There is still an opportunity for the House to take action and we hope they will," she said.

In the meantime, Ms. Boyd said the administration is examining what the impact will be to have the current laws sunset and no successor laws in place due to gubernatorial vetoes. "Suffice to say we're exploring all of the implications and options," she said.

Spokespeople for Republicans in both chambers say that because Ms. Granholm has changed her stance on the welfare reform package, particularly her support for a cash assistance time limit for able-bodied adults, they will not decide whether to let the bills if vetoed stand as they are with no further action or whether they will use the sine die day set for December 29 to pass an extension on the sunset.

"The plan was that we would pass the bills and she would hopefully sign them," said Matt Resch, spokesperson for House Speaker Craig DeRoche (R-Novi).

Ari Adler, spokesperson for Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema (R-Wyoming) said the bill extending the deadline wasn't needed because the package that passed already extends the deadline to 2009. "It would be redundant to pass them both," he said.

The sunset extension was worded so that the Legislature can consider the welfare reform coinciding with the completion of the budget in September. The extension to 2009 is part of the 48-month time limit bill (HB 5438).

The governor should do the right thing and sign the package, Mr. Adler said. "This agreement was reached between the House and the Senate, and we were working with the administration." The bills passed and sent Ms. Granholm "are the right ones at this time."

However, members of the Michigan Catholic Conference and League of Human Services say the governor would be taking the right approach by vetoing the bills and requesting the Legislature come back and pass the extension.

HB 5438 is tie-barred to eligibility requirements for the Work First program (SB 892) and the three-strike sanctions (HB 5441) is tie-barred to the Supplemental Security Income legislation (HB 5439). The other bills, HB 5440 and HB 5442, are not tie-barred to anything and the Senate bills (SB 893 and SB 894) are not tie-barred to each other.

"We think we need, number one, a more deliberative process," said Sharon Parks, vice president of policy for the League of Human Services. "This was a hasty process. I think (in the future) there is an opportunity to do some important things."

The League supports increased assessment of individuals and placement into more training and education programs, but Ms. Parks said the current sanctions of 30 days for a violation of the program are strict enough.

David Maluchnik of the Michigan Catholic Conference said the organization also supports a veto by the governor on the package and reconvened legislation action because the new reforms could put people on the welfare system in jeopardy with a lifetime limit.

Published December 15, 2005

Welfare reform: Granholm should veto bills that are inflexible, harm children

A Lansing State Journal editorial

Republicans in the Michigan Legislature just dumped a ton of coal in the stockings of thousands of Michigan kids.

The GOP-dominated Legislature passed welfare reforms that will limit most recipients to four years' cash assistance. Sure, it might motivate some people to find work (if they can find it in this shaky economy). But the unintended casualties in this reform package are Michigan's most vulnerable residents - children.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm has signaled she will veto the welfare reform package. She should.

Many of the 20,000 state residents who would be affected by the reform are children, according to Associated Press reports. It's safe to assume that many of these children live in poverty or close to it.

Is that the Republicans' aim, to make these vulnerable citizens even more vulnerable?

This is not to say that Michigan's welfare system is untouchable. In fact, other parts of this reform package are progressive and needed. There's a three-strikes-and-you're-out provision for recipients who fail their work or training requirements. There are provisions to help people get the training and education needed to get jobs.

But the deal-breaker is the four-year, lifetime limit on cash assistance. That's too inflexible, especially given the vagaries of Michigan's economy. People trying to get off welfare through education and training could lose their benefits before they can transition into the work force. And the ones who will pay most dearly are the recipients' children.

Reach for the veto pen, governor.

Break cycle of dependency

Grand Rapids Press Editorial

Thursday, December 15, 2005

The goal of welfare reform is not punishment. It's supposed to be an effort to help those who receive aid to see it as a launching pad not a lodestone. Michigan lawmakers passed a package of bills that would most notably limit cash assistance for able-bodied adults to four years. This is a reasonable time span for most people if the state effectively delivers support services and people take advantage of them.

Getting out of poverty requires education, job training and discipline. Gov. Jennifer Granholm should support breaking a cycle of dependency for those capable of holding a job. The timing will never be ideal.

The Family Independence Program provides low-income families in the state with cash assistance. The program cost the state about \$390 million last fiscal year. Some 78,000 households or 212,000 recipients -- 10,852 from Kent County -- are served. Under the proposed legislation, eligibility and work requirements would be revised including:

Establishing a cumulative 48-month limit on cash assistance for able adults, who are eligible to participate in Work First programs for education, job training and other employment-related services.

A 12-month extension, beyond the 48 months, is possible if labor market conditions or unemployment barriers exist.

Require people who have not earned a high school diploma or General Education Diploma (GED) or read at or below 8th grade level to enroll in one or more programs for high school completion/GED, literacy or English as a Second Language.

Education/training would be counted towards work requirements for two years instead of one. Suspend benefits of those who refuse to work, attend school or training -- 90 days for the first and second violation and two years for the third.

The reforms alone won't be sufficient to change people's way of life, but they are a necessary good step. Michigan has lagged behind other states that recognized the need to impose limits not just for budgetary reasons but to counteract self-defeating dependency. Besides Michigan, only Maine, Vermont and the District of Columbia don't require any time limit on welfare. Illinois has a five-year limit and Ohio three years.

Welfare was never meant to be lifetime assistance for families but much like public housing, generation after generation has remained trapped. Rep. Jerry Kooiman, R-Grand Rapids, and Sen. Bill Hardiman, R-Kentwood, key architects of the legislation deserve credit for pushing changes that could offer families a way to self-sufficiency.

Changing welfare recipients' way of approaching life won't come easily or quickly. Fundamental changes to welfare requires a serious commitment. Welfare recipients must be willing to fully embrace services that give them employable skills, and the state has to be devoted to supplying adequate staffing, resources and other support. Taxpayers should expect those able to work to do so. Governor Granholm should support a more focused, accountable system.

Reasonable reform

Jackson Citizen Patriot Editorial

Thursday, December 15, 2005

The state Legislature this week passed a package of bills that, depending on one's view, should spur welfare recipients to work or put an unbearable hardship on them. The welfare-reform package goes now to Gov. Jennifer Granholm, who we feel should ignore doomsday rhetoric and sign this common-sense policy into law.

The heart of the legislation is a lifetime limit on how much cash assistance Michigan residents can collect. The bills set a 48-month cap on an individual's welfare payments. Beyond that, such a person is no longer state taxpayers' responsibility. Also noteworthy are curbs on assistance to those who can't follow the welfare program's rules.

None of this is unreasonable, yet that's not what some critics would have anyone believe. One Flint state representative said the changes were unfair because not everyone in Michigan can find a job. Really? The last we checked, unemployment was falling. Michigan's economy has many well-documented problems, but this reform effort rightly presumes that someone who is able in body and mind should find work within four years.

While voting followed largely partisan lines, this is not some political hijacking of public policy. Republican lawmakers who pushed the reform compromised and excluded those who aren't physically or mentally able from the 48-month limit. This effort recognizes that welfare is part of the social safety net, but that taxpayers can't be asked to fund it irresponsibly. Encouraging people to look past welfare to make their way in life ultimately is good for an economic system built on the notion of work and personal responsibility.

The Legislature has done its part. The governor should do the same.

Prayer invoked to sway Schwarz

Andy Rathbun

The Enquirer

Battle Creek residents tried to influence Congress on Wednesday through the power of prayer.

About 50 people attended a vigil at St. Philip Catholic Church, opposing a congressional reconciliation bill that would scale back funding for food stamps, along with other social programs that benefit the poor.

The vigil, hosted by the Battle Creek-based Joint-religious Organizing Network for Action and Hope, called upon U.S. Rep. Joe Schwarz, R-Battle Creek, to vote against the bill. Among JONAH's associate members is Michael McCullough, executive editor of the Battle Creek Enquirer. Schwarz said Tuesday that he plans to vote for the bill and characterized it as a way to slow — not reduce — spending, though that argument carried little weight with people like Rose Miller.

Miller, a Battle Creek resident, said she grew up living on food stamps. Though she doesn't use them anymore, she said she knows that at times, it's difficult to make ends meet.

After the vigil, Miller said she believed prayer could help influence Congress' decision.

"I believe in the spiritual," Miller said. "I believe all things in Christ strengthen us. Yes, I do believe this will help."

JONAH president Charlie Farnum wasn't quite that optimistic, but he was encouraged by the turnout.

"I've seen people who don't know each other praying together, speaking together," Farnum said.

Joyce Wilson was one of those individuals who sat hand in hand, head bowed, with strangers.

"What I think is so wonderful is it's a gathering of people who are all from different faiths, economic environments," Wilson said. "I think collectively, we as Americans feel very, very isolated, and our representatives seem remote in our government."

The bill was condemned earlier Wednesday morning at First Pentecostal Church of God in Christ, where members of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees also asked Schwarz to vote against the bill.

Ron Peterson, political director for AFSCME, called the bill a "deadly deficit plan" as its supporters trumpet the fact it will reduce government spending.

"(Schwarz) has supported working people in the past," Peterson said, "and we just ask ... that he considers being considerate of all the needs of health care to child support programs to student loan programs."

Marvin Austin, president and chief executive officer of Legacy

Enterprises, agreed.

"We cannot afford to (reduce the budget) on the backs of the elderly, of the poor and of students who are looking to improve their lives through college education," Austin said.

While some speakers used partisan language, First Pentecostal Pastor Elmer Hess outright avoided the issue of political leanings.

"I view this as a nonpartisan issue," Hess said. "I see this as not necessarily who's right, but what's right, and ... I urge Rep. Joe Schwarz to listen to the community, to listen to those who oppose this bill."

Andy Rathbun can be reached at 962-3380 or arathbun@battlecr.gannett.com.

Originally published December 15, 2005

Protesters lament proposed budget cuts

Thursday, December 15, 2005

bwalters@kalamazoogazette.com 388-8563

Calling the proposed federal budget "immoral," about 40 people sang, prayed and carried signs in front of U.S. Rep. Fred Upton's downtown Kalamazoo office Wednesday.

"We have studied our nation's budget and we are appalled. It's not a Democratic issue. It's not a Republican issue. It's a moral issue," said Larry Oppliger of Kalamazoo, shouting over the sound of the clinging bells of the passing Holly Jolly Trolley and the crash of concrete and glass at a nearby construction site.

Oppliger, a retired professor of physics at Western Michigan University, is president of the Kalamazoo-based Interfaith Strategy for Advocacy and Action in the Community, or ISAAC, one of several groups represented in a nationwide effort Wednesday to bring attention to the budget.

The U.S. House of Representatives just before Thanksgiving approved more than \$50 billion in cuts over five years for programs such as Medicaid, food stamps, student loans, farm subsidies and child support enforcement. It also passed \$95 billion in tax cuts.

The Senate version held \$35 billion in program cuts.

Many of the budget cuts will be felt most at the state and local level, some analysts indicate. According to a press kit handed out at the protest, Michigan would lose \$276 million in federal matching payments for medical services to children, seniors and persons with disabilities over five years, and \$249 million to collect child support payments for more than 100,000 families. The press kit was issued by Emergency Campaign for America's Priorities, whose spokesman, Brad Woodhouse, is a former Democratic campaign strategist.

Other analysis finds those dollar amounts relatively insignificant.

"Even though there is a lot of angst over the budget, a cut of \$56 billion over five years or \$40 billion in spending cuts is pretty mild. It's almost a rounding error," Greg Valliere, a political economist for the Stanford Washington Research Group, is quoted in CNNMoney.

If Upton has his way, the cuts won't happen.

Upton was one of three Republicans voting against the tax cuts. He voted for the budget cuts, but he said Wednesday night that he is among a group of Republicans working on several fronts to resolve the House and Senate versions in a way that would spare low-income families from feeling the impact.

"If we reach a conclusion on the bill this week, it will for sure be softer than what was passed in the House," Upton said. "I am convinced that at the end of the day, there will be no food-stamp reduction."

Upton is "fairly convinced" that cuts to child-support enforcement would be "jettisoned entirely." And an amendment passed in committee could spare Michigan changes in Medicaid for at least three years, he said.

Marchers urge protection for poor

Thursday, December 15, 2005

By Eric Gallippo
The Grand Rapids Press

HOLLAND -- A group of area residents gathered in front of the office of U.S. Rep. Pete Hoekstra Wednesday afternoon to protest proposed budget cuts they believe will affect social programs for the nation's poor.

The informally assembled group of about 20 people, calling itself Holland-Area Concerned Citizens, marched in front of Hoekstra's River Avenue office carrying signs that read "Don't Cut Food Stamps," and "A moral budget cares for the needy," stopping momentarily to share prayers and thoughts on the nation's budget.

The vigil was one of many scheduled to take place across the country Wednesday as organized by Sojourners Magazine, a Christian publication for peace and justice, while members of both chambers of Congress work out the details of the federal budget.

"We're just people who felt there should be accountability in our government to us," said event organizer Sara Leeland, of Holland.

As a community, Leeland said Holland already does a lot to take care of the needy, and she believes many in the area would agree with the group's message.

"Holland folks really have a sense of social justice," Leeland said.

However without the continued help of government-funded programs, Leeland said individual charity will not be enough.

While others marched, Pam Nordhof collected signatures for a petition asking Hoekstra, R-Holland, to side with the Senate's budget bill, which the group says, unlike the House bill, keeps full funding for low-income people.

Dave Yonkman, spokesman for Hoekstra's office, declined to comment on claims made by the protesters.

"We had not heard from the folks before they showed up at the office (Wednesday), but we would be more than willing to schedule a meeting to sit down with them and listen to their concerns," Yonkman said by phone from Washington, D.C.

Some may face choice: Whether to heat or eat

By Richard Wolf, USA TODAY

December 13, 2005

WASHINGTON — The Bush administration has denied requests from five states to increase food stamps for low-income families facing higher heating bills this winter.

Maine, New York, Kansas, Virginia and South Carolina sought to raise monthly food stamp allotments by projecting what families will pay to heat their homes. The increases would have ranged from \$8 to about \$30 a month for families who pay their own utility bills.

State officials and advocates for the poor said the decision will make it hard for needy families to afford both heat and food. The Energy Department has forecast 25% average increases in heating bills this winter. Research shows that when utility bills rise, some poor families reduce food purchases.

Robert Greenstein, director of the liberal Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, said federal food stamp law says benefits should reflect current costs. "It's effectively cheating low-income families," he said. If the five states' requests had been approved, many others would have followed, he said.

The Agriculture Department, which runs the food stamp program, said the best solution to rising utility bills is an increase not in food stamps, but in the low-income heating assistance program. The administration supports a \$1 billion increase, pending in Congress. Advocates for the poor say as much as \$4 billion is needed.

Jean Daniel, director of public affairs for the Agriculture Department's Food and Nutrition Service, said states can seek an increase in food stamps if they document higher utility bills. That way, she said, the government can "make sure that each individual is getting the right benefit amount ... not too little, not too much."

The federal food stamp program helps 25.7 million Americans pay for food by giving them an average of \$92.70 in purchasing power each month. To be eligible, family income generally must be below 130% of the federal poverty level, or about \$25,100 for a family of four.

At least two states — Maine and New York — said they would appeal the decisions.

- Barbara Van Burgel, acting director of Maine's Office of Integrated Access and Support, said families are expected to spend about \$200 more this winter to heat their homes. "They'll use that cash for heating, and they will have less food on the table," she said.

- Russell Sykes, deputy commissioner of New York's Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, said the decision "forces some difficult circumstances on people who have marginal incomes."

- Duke Storen, director of benefit programs in Virginia, said rising heating bills represent "just as big a crisis for low-income and vulnerable households this winter" as Hurricane Katrina was for Gulf Coast residents.

James Weill, president of the Food Research and Action Center, said the decision "will force people to choose between heat, medicine and food. ... We know that people will eat less. ... It will have particularly damaging effects on kids, especially poor kids."

But Daniel said actual figures, not projections, are required. "We also have a responsibility to the taxpayers," she said.

Published December 15, 2005

[From the Lansing State Journal]

State Rep. Leslie Mortimer: Welfare bills aid needy, taxpayers

Michigan's welfare system needs more accountability; both recipients and taxpayers deserve it. That's why House and Senate Republicans approved legislation that would overhaul our welfare system by providing opportunities for success and ensuring accountability with tax dollars.

For months, members of both parties and from both chambers met with front-line welfare case workers throughout the state. We compared Michigan to other states in the Midwest, as well as reviewing our compliance with federal guidelines.

We studied how current laws impact those on welfare, and if we are making the best use of every taxpayer dollar. The people we talked to told us the system needed reform, so that's what our plan will do.

We recognize there is no easy answer to the welfare issue, but one thing we know for certain is that continuing to do nothing to break the cycle of dependence isn't the answer. Instead of pretending the problem doesn't exist, we are addressing it head on.

Our reforms help able-bodied members of our society gain the skills and education necessary to move from welfare to the work force. The reform places an emphasis on job-training and education programs that will assist individuals in obtaining a GED. It fast-tracks literacy programs and allows able-bodied recipients to keep more of the money they earn through work without losing benefits.

At the same time, taxpayers need more accountability for use of their tax dollars; money allocated for welfare should not be spent on enabling individuals to avoid work or beat the system.

Our reforms will establish a lifetime limit of four years for those able-bodied individuals receiving cash assistance. We will also require work or education and implement a three-strikes-and-you're-out policy for those who continually refuse to work.

It may be surprising to know Michigan is the only state in the Great Lakes to not have a lifetime limit for welfare assistance and one of five nationwide. Indiana has a two-year limit, Ohio a three-year limit and Illinois a five-year limit. Taxpayers need some accountability.

In the end, we have two goals: first, to improve Michigan's welfare system so that able-bodied adults can use their skills to move from welfare and poverty to employment where they earn a regular paycheck; and, second, to make sure every tax dollar is spent wisely.

With the changes we have suggested and passed, Michigan will have a system in place that fulfills the true purpose of welfare: by exempting those with physical or mental disabilities we are taking care of those with the greatest need, while we also assist other recipients with the education and training they need to become self-sufficient and ensuring that taxpayers are not footing the bill when the system is abused.

Jobless rate 6.6% in state, 5% in U.S.

December 15, 2005

BY JOHN GALLAGHER
FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITER

Pushed upward by an influx of seasonal job seekers, Michigan's unemployment rate swelled to 6.6% in November.

The 0.5-point increase over October's 6.1% rate is sure to keep Michigan among the states with the highest jobless rates in the nation when the federal government releases its compilation later in the month.

Michigan's Department of Labor & Economic Growth said total employment in the state grew by 6,000 during November, but as the state's labor force expanded by 34,000, unemployment rose by 28,000.

The national unemployment rate in November was 5.0%.

"The rise in the jobless rate in November was due primarily to a sizable increase in the number of individuals entering the state's labor force seeking seasonal jobs," said Rick Waclawek, director of DLEG's Bureau of Labor Market Information and Strategic Initiatives.

"The magnitude of seasonal change in Michigan's workforce varies from year to year."

November's rise came after three months of falling unemployment rates in Michigan. The previous declines had boosted hopes that the state's five-year slump in the labor markets might finally be turning around.

But economists at the University of Michigan had recently predicted that the rate would rise again and that Michigan would suffer a record sixth straight year of job losses in 2006 before seeing a modest turnaround in 2007.

Dana Johnson, chief economist at **Comerica Inc.**, said the volatility of the state jobless rate cannot hide the negative reality, that Michigan has been battered by layoffs in its core automotive manufacturing sector. More layoffs loom as companies like **Ford Motor Co.**, **General Motors Corp.** and parts supplier **Delphi Corp.** all undergo restructurings.

"To me the underlying message is that Michigan has a much higher unemployment rate than the nation has. And that's been typical all year. It is a symptom of lagging performance," Johnson said.

Lansing-based economist Patrick Anderson agreed.

"Michigan's economy is in a crisis. Even when the rate dropped down last month, it was because 26,000 workers either left the state or stopped looking for work. Clearly that's not a healthy trend," he said. Michigan's manufacturing employment remained unchanged during November. And government employment rose slightly after recording significant declines in the middle of the year.

Minor employment gains were recorded in leisure and hospitality services (up 2,000 jobs) and in the trade, transportation and utilities sector (up 2,000).

All other major industry categories were little changed over the month.

Contact **JOHN GALLAGHER** at 313-222-5173 or gallagher@freepress.com.

Thursday, December 15, 2005

Mich. jobless rate jumps to 6.6% **Thousands search for holiday work, pushing rate up;** **ailing state economy can't keep pace with nation.**

Louis Aguilar / The Detroit News

Michigan's unemployment rate jumped to 6.6 percent in November, widening the gap between the nation's economic growth and the state's sputtering economy, according to monthly job data from the Michigan Department of Labor & Economic Growth.

The 6.6 percent rate, a five-tenths of a percentage point increase from October, reflects a sharp increase in the number of state residents looking for seasonal holiday work, said Rick Waclawek, director of the state's Bureau of Labor Market Information and Strategic Initiatives.

One was Carlos Ramirez, 27, of River Rouge. For the first time in three years, the construction worker is filing for unemployment during the winter months because work has dried up.

The housing market has cooled, which means fewer houses to work on. And while there are renovations of major buildings under way, particularly in downtown Detroit, Ramirez hasn't had much luck getting work.

"A lot of work is being done under the table these days," Ramirez said, as builders try to cut costs.

The state's labor force, which includes the number of people working and the number of residents looking for work, increased by 34,000 in November. That figure includes a 28,000 spike in the number of jobless, which includes those collecting unemployment benefits but looking for a job.

"Michigan has had three straight years of recession when the rest of the country is doing well. It's unnerving," said Patrick Anderson, a Lansing-based economist who heads his own economic consulting firm.

The national unemployment rate remained at 5 percent in November, about the same as the prior six months' levels, which were in the range of 4.9 percent to 5.1 percent. Michigan's unemployment rate has hovered around 6.6 percent over the past six months, and has reached as high as 7 percent.

Several Metro Detroit residents interviewed Wednesday were looking for temporary work this holiday because they recently lost full-time jobs.

Charlotte Judge, 26, of Berkley was laid off shortly before Thanksgiving after three years as a sales clerk in a Farmington antique store.

Teri Haddad, 27, of Ferndale lost her two-year office manager job at a graphics art firm in Novi after the firm slashed its staff to two people from six in October.

Judge got a call Wednesday from a Target store, one of eight department stores she has applied to for a seasonal sales job. Haddad planned to walk around Ferndale's downtown shopping district, filled with little boutiques, record stores and cafes, to hand out resumes today.

The unsteady job market is causing the young women, both college-educated, to think about leaving Michigan.

"If I have to go back to school and waitress for a while, that's fine," Judge said. "But why not do it in a Brooklyn or an Austin?" she said.

"Everybody seems to be hurting a least little bit in Michigan," Haddad said. "There's lots of clubs and other new things going on, but, at the same time, everybody seems to be cutting their expenses."

Retailers like Meijer, which has 171 stores in Michigan, and Borders, which has 17 stores here, say seasonal hiring is on par with last year, though neither company would say how many seasonal workers they expect to hire.

Still, in November, there was a loss of 2,000 retail jobs compared with October, and a loss of 9,000 such jobs from November 2004, according to state data.

Officials from several Metro Detroit Michigan Works! Agencies say seasonal hiring seems to be about even with last year.

There wasn't any major loss of jobs in any sector in November, the monthly data show.

Factory jobs have remained essentially unchanged at 671,000 for three months, though there are 14,000 fewer factory jobs now than in November 2004. A University of Michigan economic forecast shows that state manufacturers have shed 25 percent of their workers since 2001, and 28,000 more jobs will be gone by 2007.

There were small gains of 2,000 jobs in the leisure and hospitality services, which includes tourism-related jobs, and government jobs, in November.

Since November 2004, most of the statewide payroll job declines were recorded in three sectors: government, manufacturing and retail. Over the year, most other job categories have remained relatively stable, according to state data.

Dana Johnson, chief economist for Comerica Inc., says the 6.6 percent jobless rate seems a "pretty realistic take on the Michigan economy" that reflects the lack of job growth in Michigan and the "general lag compared to the national numbers."

The recent U-M economist forecast says the state will continue to struggle with one of the nation's highest unemployment rates, many families will see their incomes decline, and businesses will have to get more creative and disciplined to weather an economy that will lag the nation for the 12th straight year.

Over the past five years, about 308,900 jobs have vanished in Michigan and another 9,600 may disappear in 2006, the U-M economists said.

You can reach Louis Aguilar at (313) 222-2760 or laguilar@detnews.com.

Gongwer
December 14, 2005

JOBLESS RATE WORSENS WITH SEASONAL WORKER INFLUX

Although the state added 9,000 jobs in November, the stagnant economy was unable to absorb 34,000 workers who joined the workforce over the past month – largely those seeking seasonal work – as the unemployment rate was pushed up by half a percentage point to 6.6 percent. State officials pointed to a 10.4 percent (40,000) drop in the number of unemployed persons over the past year, compared to 5.5 percent nationally, but the number of nonfarm payroll jobs also fell by 35,000 (.7 percent), with most losses in manufacturing, government, retail trade and information.

The state unemployment rate continues to outpace the national average, which stood at 5 percent in November, though in the comparison to the situation a year ago the state rate has improved by .8 percentage points compared to .4 percentage points nationally, the Department of Labor and Economic Growth said in its monthly report on Wednesday.

“The rise in the jobless rate in November was due primarily to a sizeable increase in the number of individuals entering the state’s labor force seeking seasonal jobs,” Rick Waclawek, director of DLEG’s Bureau of Labor Market Information and Strategic Initiatives, said.

Total employment had been generally on an upward tick throughout the year, with the 4.798 million jobs the highest level to date this year, and 77,000 more than a year ago. That number compares to 4.65 million who were working three years ago in the first year of the Granholm administration and several months into the recession.

The number of unemployed persons seeking work, which had dropped sharply by 68,000 in October, rebounded back higher by 28,000 to a level of 337,000, according to state estimates.

In the Detroit metropolitan area, the unemployment rate rose by 1 percentage point to 7.1 percent, from the prior month, as the number of idled workers increased by 23,000. Still, the rate is .4 percentage points lower than it was a year ago.

Among payroll jobs, employment has held steady for four months as various sectors shed jobs or gain jobs, depending on the industry. The gains that were recorded since October were in leisure/hospitality services, government and trade/transportation/utilities and the state estimates show that manufacturing has been steady for three months. The trend in the second half of the year has been for professional/business services to add jobs.

November Unemployment Back To 6.6%

The state's November jobless rate rose from 6.1 percent in October to 6.6 percent in November compared to a five percent unemployment average for the United States.

According to the Department of Labor and Economic Growth (DLEG), the five-tenths of one percent rise in jobless numbers was due to the fact that while 6,000 new jobs were added, some 34,000 workers re-entered the labor force.

On the bright side, at 6.6 percent, the state's jobless rate is eight-tenths of one percent lower than it was a year ago.

"The rise in the jobless rate in November was due primarily to a sizeable increase in the number of individuals entering the state's labor force seeking seasonal jobs," said Rick **WACLAWEK**, director of DLEG's Bureau of Market Information and Strategic Initiatives. "The magnitude of seasonal change in Michigan's workforce varies from year to year."

Under the label 'labor force trends and highlights,' DLEG points out the following:

- The jobless rate of 6.6 percent places November's rate at similar levels recorded in August and September.
- With the minor employment gain over the month, November's statewide total of 4,798,000 workers was the highest level recorded so far in 2005. Total employment has been trending upward throughout the year.
- Since November 2004, unemployment fell in Michigan by 40,000 or 10.6 percent, which outpaced the nationwide decrease of 5.5 percent for the same period.

The 6,000 new jobs in the economy during the month of November came from minor payroll employment gains in leisure and hospitality services (up 2,000 jobs), government (up 2,000 jobs), and trade, transportation and utilities (also up 2,000 jobs). Other economic sectors recorded little change over the month.

Sex-abuse suspect seeks dismissal

Thursday, December 15, 2005

By Barton Deiters
The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- A former day-care provider charged with multiple counts of sexually assaulting children is trying to get one charge against him dropped.

Kristopher Cross was in Kent County Circuit Court Wednesday, asking that evidence of child pornography found on his home computer be thrown out because the police detective who obtained the search warrant allegedly overstated his expertise.

Defense lawyer Michael VanTubergen questioned Grand Rapids Det. Pete Kemme, who works with the Children's Assessment Center on cases involving child abuse, about whether he understood the workings of computers as well as it was stated on a search warrant executed last year at Cross' home, 2642 Fuller Ave. NE, where Cross and his wife ran a day care.

Cross was arrested Dec. 1. He is charged with sexually assaulting three girls, ages 5 to 7, from late 2001 to 2004. If convicted, he faces life in prison.

He is also charged with having child pornography on his computer.

Computer knowledge

VanTubergen challenged Kemme about his computer training, contrasting testimony the detective gave in October saying he attended a couple of hourlong seminars on computer pornography, and his testimony Wednesday that he attended two sessions lasting between 1.5 and 3 hours each.

"You didn't know what you were talking about when you asked for that warrant?" VanTubergen asked Kemme, who was described in the warrant as having computer knowledge.

"I'm not very computer literate" Kemme said. "I don't know how it does it, I just know it does." Kemme testified the warrant was typed by Assistant Kent County Prosecutor Helen Brinkman. But Kemme said he reviewed the warrant and had input on what it contained.

Using the warrant, police say they found pornographic material on the computer depicting teenage girls.

VanTubergen argued that, because the warrant was obtained with false information, it would make any evidence found through it "fruit of the poisoned tree."

A 'red herring'

If the computer-based evidence cannot be used, the child pornography charge should be tossed out, he said.

However, Assistant Kent County Prosecutor Tim McMorro called the defense motion a "red herring."

"I don't know anything about the technical aspects of a computer ... but I know how to use them," McMorro said. "He truthfully signed this warrant."

Judge Paul Sullivan said he wanted to review the October transcripts before making his decision, which is expected within the next few days.

Cross remains in the Kent County Jail.

During the same appearance, Sullivan increased Cross' bond to \$100,000, saying he violated it when he went to the DLK Family and Friends Day Care Center, 3999 Alpenhorn Drive NW, in

November, while children were present. Cross and his wife, Amanda, purchased the center this fall, about the time they shut down their home day care. Amanda Cross said this week she and her husband no longer own the Family and Friends center.

Because of the criminal investigation, the state suspended the couple's home day-care license and cited Family and Friends for allowing Cross in the building after officials informed the center's staff he was not to be there.

Cross is not accused of crimes at Family and Friends.

Cross' next court appearance is scheduled for Friday, a preliminary hearing on his criminal charges.

Baby's life ends; probe begins

Thursday, December 15, 2005

By Ken Kolker
The Grand Rapids Press

GEORGETOWN TOWNSHIP -- Detectives are investigating the death of a 16-month-old girl, who suffered severe abuse-related injuries a year ago and died Sunday from new injuries. The death of Elizabeth Rose Gelineau in her Georgetown Township home was ruled a homicide, according to Kent County Medical Examiner Stephen Cohle.

Relatives said the death raises new questions about what happened to the girl when she was 11 days old, when abusive treatment left her with a fractured skull, broken ribs and a broken collarbone in August 2004.

Her father, John Gelineau, now 19, pleaded no contest to a felony abuse charge in the 2004 incident, but maintained his innocence, they said. The recent Grandville High School graduate had not seen his daughter since August, when he began a 90-day jail sentence for the previous abuse, relatives said.

Detectives today said they have ruled him out as a suspect in the death.

"He's cooperated with the investigation," said Ottawa County sheriff's Lt. Mark Bennett, who met with investigators this morning. "He's not involved."

Bennett said the death is leading detectives to look again at the previous abuse. "The investigation will encompass all the incidents that may have occurred in this young child's life to see if we can come up with a suspect," he said.

At the time of her death, the baby was living at her maternal great-grandparents' house with her mother and her mother's boyfriend, Bennett said.

Police and rescuers were called to the home, 1501 Ridgewood Drive, about 1:30 p.m. Sunday and found the girl unconscious. Paramedics gave her CPR and worked on her for a half-hour before she died at the home.

The autopsy found the death was "definitely not from the injury" suffered by the girl shortly after her birth, Bennett said. "She died from recent injuries" that were not accidental, he said.

A funeral was planned today at Beverly Reformed Church, 2141 Porter St. SW in Wyoming.

"She was treasured by all who knew her and flew away too soon," her newspaper obituary read. The baby's mother, Rachel Timmer, could not be reached for comment. John Gelineau declined to be interviewed.

Gelineau and Timmer, now 18, met at Grandville High School, where he was a running back on the football team and lettered in three sports, said his father. She played in the band.

They were juniors in high school when she became pregnant. They did "the right thing" and got married on May 1, 2004, Gelineau's father said.

The newlyweds moved into the home on Ridgewood with her grandparents. But the marriage started breaking down, said Gelineau's father, Bill Gelineau, who has made several unsuccessful bids for the state Legislature.

John Gelineau was just starting his senior year at Grandville High School when he was accused of second-degree child abuse.

Court documents show the child was taken to Saint Mary's Health Care, suffering from a fractured skull, three broken ribs and a fractured clavicle. The injuries were inflicted on Aug. 18, 2004 -- 11 days after Elizabeth was born, court records show.

A doctor who examined the child said those injuries were not accidental.

A week later, the girl was placed with Rachel Timmer's grandparents, Percy and Louise Crothers, after an abuse and neglect petition was filed to terminate parental rights of the mother and father.

"The court finds the child is at serious risk of further physical harm if she remains in the parents' care and custody," according to the petition filed with Ottawa County Family Court.

The couple separated the same month, according to a divorce petition filed by Rachel Timmer.

The court returned the child to the mother on Jan. 18. John Gelineau later pleaded no contest to the felony child-abuse charge.

Gelineau's father said his son accepted responsibility even though the teen repeatedly denied abusing his daughter.

"It's impossible for him to be involved in this. He didn't do the first one, either," Bill Gelineau said.

"He was convinced he could plead no contest and put it behind him," his father said. "He was the sacrificial lamb."

Gelineau's relatives said they hadn't seen Elizabeth since her first birthday. They said John Gelineau last saw her Aug. 23, the day before he went to Ottawa County Jail to serve the 90-day sentence.

"She was a beautiful little flower," said John Gelineau's mother, Tracey McLaughlin of Grandville.

"I'm just kind of hoping and praying that, in between the two (injuries), she was happy," said Elizabeth's paternal grandmother,

The state's Family Independence Agency and Ottawa County Family Court reviewed the child's welfare with the mother in May, August and on Nov. 18 and found no red flags, records show.

John Gelineau was still in jail in September when he wrote to Ottawa County Circuit Court to fight his estranged wife's August 2005 request for a divorce, court records show.

"I love the plaintiff more than anything in existence, and I love my daughter even more," he wrote. "I just ask for the opportunity to raise my daughter with the woman I love."

But on Nov. 3, his estranged wife filed a petition for a personal protection order -- two days after he was released from jail -- claiming he had left her a "nasty" phone message.

Court officials on Nov. 18 said they were exploring whether John Gelineau could see his daughter in supervised visits.

Press writer John Tunison contributed to this story.

Baby, truck gone in just seconds

But bystander nabs the suspect

December 15, 2005

BY NIRAJ WARIKOO
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

The mother was in the Dearborn day care center for less than 60 seconds.

But that was enough time Tuesday morning for an 18-year-old Dearborn Heights man to drive off in her truck -- with her 10-month-old daughter in the backseat, police said.

The truck -- and the girl -- were later recovered in Dearborn Heights and reunited with mother Julie Gazdecki.

"Everything happened so fast," said Gazdecki, 34, of Dearborn, after the incident. "I was pretty freaked out at first, but I just knew everything would be OK."

The man, whose name is being withheld, was arrested on charges of stealing a vehicle and abducting an infant, said Dearborn Police Chief Michael Celeski. The man is in the custody of Dearborn police.

The incident started at 8:06 a.m., police said.

Gazdecki was dropping off her 4-year-old daughter at the Early Learning Center on Monroe Street. She left her Chevy Silverado running in the parking lot with her 10-month-old in a car seat.

"I wasn't even in there 60 seconds," Gazdecki said. Normally, it's hard to go in and out of the parking lot quickly because it is small and usually filled with people and cars, she said.

"Of all places, I never thought it would happen here," she said.

But while she was inside the center, the man hopped into the truck and drove off.

Police said he stopped at the home of someone he knew in Dearborn Heights. He got out of the truck and entered the passenger seat of a second vehicle that was driven by someone else. The baby remained in the truck, which was parked on a side street.

Meanwhile, people at the day care center moved quickly to help look for the suspect, Gazdecki said. Parents and grandparents of kids in the center drove around searching for the suspect.

About 30 minutes later, a man who had spotted the fleeing suspect confronted him.

"Why are you doing this?" the man asked the suspect, police said.

The suspect jumped out of the car and tried to run away by hopping over a backyard fence. But the man nabbed the suspect and held him until police arrived.

"I can't even think right now," Gazdecki said a few hours after the incident. "I feel like I could sleep for a week."

Contact **NIRAJ WARIKOO** at 248-351-2998 or nwarikoo@freepress.com.

Baby Safe After Ride In Stolen Pickup Truck

Mother Left Engine Running In Unlocked Vehicle

POSTED: 8:21 am EST December 14, 2005

UPDATED: 1:59 pm EST December 14, 2005

DEARBORN, Mich. -- A 10-month-old girl was reunited with her mother after the pickup truck she was in was stolen from a Dearborn parking lot Wednesday morning.

Julie Gazdecki left her daughter Josephine "Jo Jo" Gazdecki in her Chevrolet Silverado -- with the engine running and doors unlocked -- while she took her older daughter inside the Dearborn Early Learning Center just, located at Monroe and Carlisle streets, just after 8 a.m., Local 4 reported.

A man drove off in the pickup truck, with Josephine still inside, the station reported.

"I just thought ... God sent her to me for a reason. Don't take her away," said Gazdecki.

The pickup truck was seen headed south on Catherine Street in Dearborn, according to police.

Police, parents of other children at the learning center and witnesses searched the area for the pickup truck. The vehicle was found within minutes, abandoned with Josephine inside, Local 4 reported.

"Everybody helped. All of the parents. They chased him," said Gazdecki. "One of the grandparents found the truck."

Debbie Abad and her husband spotted the truck in the area of the Southfield freeway and Outer Drive, according to Local 4 reports. She called 911 while her husband blocked a driveway to prevent the suspect from fleeing in another car, the station reported.

Abad said when she saw the baby all she could do was "get her out of there" and "hug her and love her and kiss her." Josephine was unharmed, according to the station's reports.

"I am shaking now because as a grandmother ... my heart goes out to families with children," said Abad.

An 18-year-old Dearborn Heights man -- who was not wearing pants -- was arrested in the yard of a home on Roosevelt Street, according to the station's reports. He is expected in court Thursday to face charges in connection with the incident.

Gazdecki thanked everyone for their help in rescuing her daughter quickly.

Copyright 2005 by ClickOnDetroit.com.

Thursday, December 15, 2005

Kathleen Parker

Adult-child sex is wrong, always

Judging from the recent spate of high-profile teacher-student sex cases, you'd think America's teachers -- especially emales -- are hopelessly lusting after their students.

As a mother of boys and witness to the animal kingdom in which they dwell, I confess to being baffled by the attraction, but that's a subject for another day. Meanwhile, what *is* going on?

And what does it mean in our sexualized culture that the lines seem to be increasingly blurred between what is appropriate and what is not. Forget "normal," not that anyone remembers.

Here's normal: Adults do not have sex with minors.

Well-adjusted grown-ups know this instinctively. Implicit in the job description of "adult" is that you take care of children and protect the innocent. Inarguably, a kid who has been roaming the Earth fewer than 18 years doesn't know diddly about the complicated consequences of romantic involvement with an adult.

We who know better are supposed to know better.

But lately our cultural understanding of what's acceptable is on shaky ground. After all, a consenting teenage boy is getting what he wants from a willing adult woman, right? And certainly a compliant 16-year-old girl can seem womanly enough to her twentysomething-year-old geography teacher. Who's to say they shouldn't enjoy each other's company?

Normal people at this point may notice a small trembling and rapid heartbeat. Do not be alarmed. The feeling that you are completely alone on Planet Earth should subside in a few more paragraphs.

Questions of the sort above keep coming up, especially since 1998, when a study published in the *Psychological Bulletin* concluded that people sexually abused as children did not always suffer terrible consequences. Defenders of the study said they weren't trying to excuse abuse, but were questioning the traditional way of treating all sexual relations with minors as "abuse."

Most people would agree that there's a difference between an 18-year-old "adult" involved with a 17-year-old "child" and an adult man ravaging an 8-year-old girl. But our nerves understandably get frayed in the context of the recent Catholic Church scandals, and when we realize that some groups, such as the North American Man/Boy Love Association, really do want societal approval of such clearly inappropriate relations.

Emotions also run high when some suggest changing the age of consent to accommodate today's more relaxed social norms, as was mentioned in a story in Sunday's *New York Times* that reviewed recent teacher-student cases. The story was accompanied by a photograph of teacher, Pamela Rogers Turner, 28, who was sentenced to nine months in jail for having sex with a 13-year-old boy.

Blond, beautiful and fetching in pinstripes (and handcuffs), she's an unfortunate poster girl for the cause against adults romancing minors. Most guys seeing her would say, "And the problem is?"

The problem, to be clear, is one of trust and power -- even in consenting relationships. An adult, especially one in a position of authority such as a teacher, counselor or priest, is always in a superior position with a minor player. It doesn't matter that 16-year-old Johnny is built like a

locomotive and has enough testosterone to power a Scud missile. He's still a kid emotionally and psychologically.

Thus the sexual act, even if consensual, is still coercive to some degree.

Same with Susie. Girls may look like Madonna en route to a pole-dancing contest, but most don't have a clue what they're doing to Mr. Smith as he's trying to stay focused on those parallelograms.

They may be adult-like physically, but they're minors otherwise -- still dependents, still living at home, and still reliant upon adults to be mentors, not sex partners. Children romantically involved with an adult tend to have all sorts of problems: shame, anxiety, lowered self-esteem, depression, vulnerability to drug and alcohol abuse, and an impaired ability to judge the trustworthiness of others, according to David Finkelhor, director of the Crimes Against Children Research Center at the University of New Hampshire.

Victims of sex abuse also are at higher risk for suicide, and may become adult sexual abusers themselves as a way of trying to gain psychological control over their own experience. The fact that not all people suffer long-lasting emotional damage as a result of such early sexual experiences surely doesn't justify relaxing our standards.

Instead, adults attracted to minors might do the grownup thing and seek psychological help. Kids will find ways enough to complicate their lives without the help of adults lost in their own narcissism.

Kathleen Parker writes for the Orlando Sentinel. Her column is distributed by Tribune Media Services, 435 N. Michigan, Suite 1500, Chicago, IL 60611. You can reach her at kparker@kparker.com.

Girl, 12, Arrested In School Threat Probe

Bomb Threat Allegedly Sent Over Instant Message To Students

POSTED: 12:46 pm EST December 15, 2005

A 12-year-old girl was arrested Thursday in connection with a threat at a Clinton Township middle school.

The bomb threat for Wyandot Middle School -- located at 39490 Garfield Road -- was made over the Internet last weekend, Local 4 reported. Several students received information about the threat, which was allegedly sent via instant message, the station reported.

A parent learned of the messages and contacted police. Police sent bomb-detecting dogs to the school, but nothing was found. Classes were held Monday, but the approximately 600 students who attend the school were searched at the entrance.

Police were able to trace the threatening messages to the suspect's home computer, according to Local 4.

The student who was arrested will face felony charges of using a computer to commit a false report for threat of terrorism, the station reported. She could face up to 20 years in prison if convicted.

Prosecutors have not decided whether to charge the girl as a juvenile or an adult.

The student's name was not released. She was expected to be taken to the Macomb County juvenile facility.

Thursday, December 15, 2005

Boy, 13, is arraigned in sexual abuse case Brighton teen faces charges of inappropriate contact with a 7-year-old girl at the city library.

Steve Pardo / The Detroit News

BRIGHTON -- A 13-year-old Brighton boy was arraigned Wednesday in Livingston County's Juvenile Court on charges that he molested a 7-year-old girl inside the Brighton District Library. The boy, whose name is not being published by The Detroit News because of his age, faces one count of second-degree criminal sexual conduct.

The charge is a 15-year-felony that involves sexual contact with a person under the age of 13. The boy also was charged with a count of child sexually abusive activity, a 20-year-felony and a third count of accosting for immoral purposes, a four-year felony that involves the intent to induce or force a child to commit or submit to a sexual act.

The incident happened Tuesday afternoon in the Brighton District Library, said Police Chief Thomas Wightman. Wightman said the girl was in the library with her mother when she was allegedly accosted. Wightman also said the girl was only out of her mother's sight for a few minutes and the girl immediately told her mother.

Diane Dart, spokeswoman for the Brighton District Library said library officials immediately called police after the girl's parents reported the incident. Library personnel didn't see or hear anything out of the ordinary, Dart said. The library's policy is for children to be accompanied by a parent, and Dart said it appears the girl was out of her mother's view for no more than a few minutes.

Livingston County Family Court Judge Susan Reck ordered the boy to be placed in temporary custody of a juvenile detention center in Washtenaw County. Court documents said, "It is contrary to the welfare of the child to remain in the home due to the parents' inability to adequately supervise the child's behavior and protect his welfare."

Calls to the boy's court-appointed attorney, Mitchell Perrault, were not returned Wednesday. A message left at the home of the boy's parents also was not returned.

The boy faces another hearing in Livingston County's Juvenile Court at 10 a.m. Tuesday. Police are continuing to investigate the case.

You can reach Steve Pardo at (517) 552-5503 or spardo@detnews.com.

LSJ
12/15

2B

IN BRIEF

Investigator won't say what caused fatal fire

ISHPEMING — A state police investigator says he has determined the cause of a nursing home fire that killed two people, but isn't ready to make it public.

"I know how the fire started, but I'm not going to release that information because that could hamper my investigation," detective Sgt. Jeff Hubbard said Wednesday.

The fire broke out early Monday at Mather Nursing Center in Ishpeming Township. More than 100 elderly residents were evacuated. Two died at Bell Memorial Hospital.

From wire reports

Published December 15, 2005

[From the Lansing State Journal]

Alison Hirschel: State nursing homes need safety upgrades

Early Monday morning, a fire broke out at an Ishpeming nursing home, which resulted in the deaths of two residents, the admission of more than 60 residents to area hospitals, and the evacuation of dozens more residents to other locations.

While tragic, it is hardly surprising that Michigan nursing home residents died and were harmed by an outbreak of fire. According to federal data, only 36 percent of Michigan nursing homes have sprinkler systems throughout the building - compared to a national average of more than 80 percent - even though there is widespread agreement that sprinkler systems prevent multiple death fires in nursing homes. No other state in the country has fewer fully sprinklered facilities.

It is just as alarming to note that, according to federal statistics, 92 percent of Michigan nursing homes were cited for fire safety violations in their last inspection.

It is shocking and unconscionable that almost two-thirds of our frail, vulnerable nursing home population live in facilities that cannot adequately protect them in case of fire and that virtually all nursing homes violate some fire safety requirements.

Michigan must require sprinkler systems in all nursing homes and must impose the stiffest possible sanctions on homes that jeopardize residents' safety by ignoring fire safety requirements. Otherwise, Michigan nursing homes will continue to be another fire tragedy waiting to happen.

Prescription drug benefit information offered

Stuart Frohm, Midland Daily News

12/14/2005

Help is available – in groups and individually – for people who want to select a plan under Medicare's new Part D prescription drug benefit.

One of the group sessions will be from 1 to 2:30 p.m. Monday at the Midland Community Center's 50+ Center in the Barstow-Shipps Wing, 2001 George St.

The session is open to the public. Its host is Midland Republican Rep. Dave Camp. Explaining the new benefit and laying out the process for enrolling will be Camp and officials from the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services, the Michigan Medicare and Medicaid Assistance Program and the Social Security Administration.

They won't tell people which plan is best for them, said Camp's spokesman, Sage Eastman. Ethics rules about congressmen "endorsing" specific products prevent Camp from hosting that type of event.

Instead, the forum will answer broad questions about the plan – such as how and when to sign up, what if any penalties exist, how the new coverage works if a person already has coverage, what type of coverage is available, the range of costs and what will be covered.

Appointments for individual, half-hour sessions in January or later can be scheduled by calling Senior Services, Midland County Council on Aging, at 633-3700. The sessions are at the Senior Services building at 4700 Dublin Ave.

To help determine which plans are best for specific people, Stacey McKinnon, Medicare educator for the agency, said she encourages individuals, their relatives or friends to use information available at the website www.medicare.gov or by talking to someone at a toll-free number.

The toll-free number is (800) 633-4227. A recorded message suggests that the caller have his or her Medicare card available.

Information on the [medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov) site is updated weekly, and the site is easier to use than when it was introduced months ago, McKinnon said.

Even in the individual sessions, the resource person doesn't say which plan is best, McKinnon said. But to get the most help from the session, a senior should have his or her list of medications, the dosages and quantities, and a Medicare card, McKinnon said.

In Midland County, 18 private companies are offering a total of 41 prescription plans, she said.

Individuals also can attend the agency's group informational sessions. McKinnon said there's still room in one from 10 to 11:30 a.m. Monday – the same day as Camp's session.

Man convicted of trying to stab wife to death

Thursday, December 15, 2005

By John S. Hausman
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

A Muskegon County jury has convicted an Egelston Township man of assault with intent to murder for stabbing his wife 11 times in the chest with a serrated steak knife.

After deliberating about two hours, jurors Wednesday afternoon found William Lee Lathrop guilty of the more serious of two charges they were considering. Fourteenth Circuit Judge Timothy G. Hicks scheduled sentencing for Jan. 20. Lathrop could be sentenced to any term in prison up to life with the possibility of parole.

Lathrop, who testified in his own defense, admitted stabbing Amy Lathrop in a rage, but claimed he couldn't remember doing it and didn't intend to kill her. If jurors had accepted his story, they had the option of convicting him of the lesser offense of assault with intent to do great bodily harm less than murder, which carries a maximum sentence of 10 years.

But the jury agreed with the argument of Senior Assistant Muskegon County Prosecutor Dale J. Hilson that Lathrop's actions showed he did mean to kill his wife.

The attack happened the afternoon of June 26 in the Lathrops' home at 1088 Parkway after an argument. According to testimony, Bill Lathrop punched Amy Lathrop repeatedly in the face as the two stood near her truck in the driveway, then dragged her by her hair into the house, where he repeatedly punched and then stabbed her as she lay on the floor. He used a steak knife with a broken-off tip that he grabbed off a table, according to testimony.

Their 16-year-old daughter tried to stop him while their 12-year-old daughter ran across the street to her grandparents' home for help, Amy Lathrop testified. Finally, after stabbing her many times, he stopped and said, "I can't believe I did this," then walked out and left her lying there without calling for aid, according to testimony.

Bill Lathrop testified that he remembered punching his wife and dragging her into the house, but not stabbing her, claiming his next memory was of kneeling beside her as she lay on her back with blood on her stomach. He said he lost his temper after she responded defiantly when he confronted her about seeing another man.

Testimony described a stormy marriage with many arguments, especially over money. Amy Lathrop described her husband as a controlling man who had threatened to kill her many times over 19 years of marriage. He denied that, and spoke of frustration over his wife's spending, especially on narcotic pills in recent years.

Amy Lathrop had moved out of their home a few days before the knife attack. Bill Lathrop repeatedly had asked her to come back.

The day of the attack, she showed up at their house around 5 p.m. to take their children to the beach. Lathrop attacked his wife after he learned she had been staying with another man, according to testimony.

Muskegon County Sheriff's deputies were called to the home about 5:30 p.m. They found the 36-year-old woman bleeding from numerous wounds.

She was taken to Mercy General Health Partners Mercy Campus and was initially listed in critical condition. She was released about four days after the attack.

Charities worry as giving declines

Thursday, December 15, 2005

By Ted Roelofs
The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- After a bad November, they are crossing their fingers at God's Kitchen, hoping this month will be better.

The downtown soup kitchen collected \$46,000 last month, a 30 percent drop from November 2004.

"That's a lot of meals," said Deb Kalinka, marketing director for Catholic Human Development Outreach, which administers and operates God's Kitchen.

The news isn't much different at In the Image, a Grand Rapids charity that supplies clothing and furniture to the needy throughout Kent County.

Individual donations are down \$4,000 -- or 30 percent -- for the first two weeks of December compared to last year, according to executive director Paul Haagsman.

The next two weeks, Haagsman said, "are incredibly important. It's our biggest harvest season. How we walk out at the end of the year dictates how we do next year."

Could it be "donor fatigue" tied to Hurricane Katrina?

An October survey of how local households give to charity suggests it might be a factor, though not likely the only one.

A survey by the Community Research Institute at the Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy at Grand Valley State University found 64 percent of local households said they gave money to help people affected by Katrina. Of those, 12 percent said they expected to decrease local gift-giving because of it.

Depending on the charity, that could be a concern as they enter a crucial time for donations, said Diana Sieger, president of the Grand Rapids Community Foundation.

"They really need the money for the here and now," Sieger said.

Overall, the survey found 59 percent said they would give the same amount as last year, 22 percent expected to increase donations and 17 percent said they would give less.

Sieger speculated recent layoffs and the threat of more might be the biggest factor in charity giving.

"I'm wondering if that's more indicative of the local economy and people's confidence," Sieger said.

James Nauta, divisional commander for the Salvation Army of Western Michigan & Northern Indiana, said the group is "cautiously optimistic" donations will come in equal or ahead of last year's total.

Thus far, the Salvation Army's Christmas campaign has raised \$472,000 of a goal of \$1.2 million.

In Bay County and beyond, charities met with bounty of giving

Thursday, December 15, 2005

By DAVID CRARY
ASSOCIATED PRESS

Donor fatigue? Not this year.

Even after the outpouring of donations for the Indian Ocean tsunami and Hurricane Katrina, holiday giving is robust this season and 2005 could well set an overall record, U.S. charity officials are reporting.

"It seems to be a phenomenal year," said Stacy Palmer, editor of the Chronicle of Philanthropy. "Donor fatigue is something not many charities are seeing."

By any measure, it's been a year of immense challenges for relief groups, and donors have responded. The year began with Americans pitching in to help faraway victims of the tsunami; those private gifts added up to \$1.6 billion. Later came Katrina, the nation's worst natural disaster of modern times, prompting donations that are nearing the \$3 billion mark.

In Bay County, the Salvation Army recently reported that giving was way down from last year in its annual Christmas kettle drive.

On Wednesday, Captain Michael Myers said he had a surprise this week when he opened a kettle and found five \$100 bills. The kettle had been outside the Wal-Mart store, 3921 E. Wilder Road, for just a few hours, he said.

The United Way of Bay County recently announced that it was optimistic this year's goal of \$1.4 million would be met.

And Jill Sutton, grants and development director for the Mid-Michigan Community Action Agency, said the agency is doing very well this year.

"We have been very successful in our capital campaign as well as our Walk for Warmth," Sutton said. "Individual local donations, as of early 2005, are very high in Bay County."

The Action Agency does a yearly Walk for Warmth in February in which it raises money to help low-income people pay their heat-related utility bills. This year the agency raised 200 percent more than its set goal, Sutton said, and is now gearing up for the walk to be held this coming February.

Some charities feared their holiday season fundraising would suffer as donors decided they had given enough. Thus far, however, end-of-year giving is generally strong, although some local charities remain worried because they have more needy people to serve.

In Lansing, for example, more than 2,200 residents have applied to get donated toys and groceries this season - up 20 percent from last year. The local Salvation Army branch had to turn away hundreds of families after exhausting a fund to help pay utility bills.

"People have been incredibly generous," said John Keightley, a spokesman for Catholic Charities USA. "But as we hit the giving season, our local agencies are nervous whether they're going to meet their goals. We're all challenged to stretch, to think about people who don't have enough."

In Omaha, Neb., the Salvation Army branch says it is running slightly ahead of last year's pace in seeking a record \$2.2 million for its holiday campaign - coincidentally the same amount the

Army raised in Omaha in response to Katrina. The holiday funds assist hometown poor with heating bills, and provide them with mittens and winter hats.

"We had some donors say they couldn't afford to give as much at the end of year because of Katrina, but we also have new donors because of it - who saw we were doing good work," said spokeswoman Susan Eustice.

The Salvation Army was among several national charities raising more in response to this year's hurricanes than for any previous disaster - \$295 million compared to \$86 million after the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks. Catholic Charities has received \$133 million for hurricane relief, compared to \$32 million for Sept. 11.

All such figures were dwarfed by the hurricane relief fund of the American Red Cross, which has surpassed \$1.8 billion - a record for any U.S. charity for a specific disaster campaign.

Kathleen Loehr, a vice president of development for the Red Cross, said Wednesday that some of the charity's chapters in hurricane-hit areas were facing shortfalls in regular donations, but the rest of the 826 chapters were reporting strong year-end giving. Overall figures were not yet available, she said.

- Times Writer Patti Brandt contributed to this report.

This helps the kids, but it also helps us'

Thursday, December 15, 2005

JESSICA SOULE

THE SAGINAW NEWS

A pink winter coat for Tasha T. Clark's 1-year-old topped the Saginaw resident's list for the annual "Shop with a Hero" event, which pairs children with public safety officials for a shopping spree.

A Wednesday morning fire destroyed Clark's rented home and most of her possessions, including the coat of her youngest child, Deja Boykins.

While there's a limit to the number of children invited to the sixth year of the Meijer-sponsored event, organizers added Clark's five children just hours after their Cumberland home burned.

"We usually cap it at 60, but these were kids that we had to (help)," said Saginaw County Sheriff Charles L. Brown. "Otherwise, these kids wouldn't have a Christmas."

Law enforcers, firefighters and emergency personnel from nearly two dozen agencies around the county helped children spend \$100 each at the Meijer store in Thomas Township on Wednesday evening.

The excursion gives children a chance to purchase surprises for family members, but escorts often make sure the youths buy for themselves, too.

School or community leaders nominate most of the children, but officers choose some they know from more unpleasant circumstances, Brown said. Police select the children who get to shop from recommendations they collect throughout the year. Many, but not all, come from needy families.

"This is the good part of my job. We're trying to help those less fortunate children have a good Christmas," Brown said.

Children often have contact with public safety officials only during traumatic experiences.

"Shop with a Hero" allows officers to shake that scary image, said Officer Brian Kanicki of the Saginaw Township Police Department.

This helps the kids, but it also helps us in the future because now they will remember us as friends," said Kanicki, who escorted Deija Clark, 7.

Deija, Tasha Clark's oldest child, hunted for items she could use to play with her siblings, including a Disney card game and re-useable clay sets.

"They're both nice, they helped me spend all my money," Deija said of the two officers who pushed her around in a shopping cart and fetched toys. "I tried to spend every dollar I had."

Volunteers are never difficult to find for the activity, said Brown, who gave up his spot a couple of years ago to make room for someone who hadn't participated.

Ten Meijer stores in Michigan participate annually. In Saginaw County, Kochville and Thomas township stores host the event in alternate years, said Gregory J. Sanders, Gratiot Meijer store director.

Families left the retail store with holiday baskets filled with goods.

Between the gifts the four Clark children collected and the Christmas presents Tasha Clark previously stashed at a friend's house, the Clarks left with hopes for a somewhat jolly holiday.

Jessica Soule is a staff writer for The Saginaw News. You may reach her at 776-9682.

Good deeds: Celebrating unsung heroes

Coney Island to help warm the homeless

Canton Township restaurant workers and family members collect winter clothes and blankets.

Catherine Jun / The Detroit News

CANTON TOWNSHIP-- The employees at Plato's Coney Island have caught the holiday spirit. The restaurant on Ford Road is collecting winter clothes and blankets and will deliver them to the homeless in Detroit.

"It's something we've always been talking about," said Tasi Kanellopoulos, 37, of Northville who co-owns the Canton Township restaurant and its sister establishment in Farmington. Both restaurants have been collecting gently used coats, scarves, hats, gloves and blankets since Thanksgiving. Customers who make a donation get a free cup of coffee.

The workers and family members of the restaurants will deliver the items on the city's streets in the first week of January. They also will bring with them about 150 toasty hotdogs.

This is the second year the restaurants have organized the drive and the owners plan to make the drive an annual tradition.

"It's a great feeling to help out," said Tom Angelopoulos, 41, who is Tarsi's cousin and business partner. "Anything we can do, we'll try to do it."

"I think it's great," said Mario Bareness, an officer with the transit police of Detroit, who helped direct the group to areas in the city where help is most needed. He will do so again this year. The group is delivering the items to those on the street in person rather than donating them to charities.

"We feel it's important to deliver to the people personally, to make sure it's getting to them," said Canelopoulos, who lives in Canton Township.

Kanellopoulos recalled that a woman last year was so grateful for a scarf and hat that she wanted to kiss her benefactors.

Chippewa Construction of Michigan Inc. in Canton Township donated a trailer to store the items and help deliver them. The restaurant is at 42405 Ford. The Farmington restaurant is at 35227 Grand River.

You can reach Catherine Jun at (734) 462-2204 or cjun@detnews.com.

Stocking idea brings gifts to needy teens

Thursday, December 15, 2005

By Gary Morrison
The Grand Rapids Press

SPARTA -- The blazing fire is not real, nor is the fireplace and mantle where nearly 50 paper stockings have been hung with care. It's what the stockings represent that matters most.

For a few years, Ridgeview Elementary School teachers and staff have picked a Stocking for an Angel from the faux fireplace in the school lobby instead of exchanging gifts.

"The North Kent Service Center needs Christmas gifts for teens," said Assistant Principal Marialyce Zeerip. "So instead of doing a staff-to-staff gift exchange, we started doing this."

The idea for a Stocking for an Angel came from special education teacher Lynelle Geers. Fourth-grade teacher Sandra Ballard designed the fireplace.

"We choose to do this for teens because they usually don't get as much for Christmas as younger children," Geers said.

"They are also harder to buy for."

The stockings list a gift idea for a teen boy or girl. Ballard said the easiest for her was to pick a stocking for a teen boy who would like something related to hunting or fishing.

"That is something my husband can help me with," she said.

Geers placed 50 stockings on the mantle and will add more if needed. Some parents have even asked if they can participate after seeing the fireplace.

"We will have a staff coffee on Dec. 16 and bring everything in," she said. "Then, we'll deliver everything to the center."

Army halfway home

Kathie Marchlewski, Midland Daily News

12/15/2005

The Salvation Army is midway through its annual Red Kettle campaign, and more than halfway to its goal.

Midlanders so far have contributed more than \$59,000 to the effort that ends on Christmas Eve.

Still, collecting enough change to supplement year-round programs isn't easy.

"It's going to be a real challenge," said Joe Malan, business administrator for the Salvation Army. "It's going to be a stretch to make it to \$100,000."

Along with placing bell-ringing volunteers at storefronts for the busy holiday shopping season, the Salvation Army also has been campaigning through local mailboxes, seeking out people who want not only to give, but to get a year-end tax deduction.

That appeal's success is down slightly, but not as much as had been feared.

"We were a little concerned that disasters like Katrina might impact local giving," Malan said. "All the non-profits were. But at this time we're pleased."

The Army is expecting to provide services to more than 3,000 people in the upcoming months – last year it reached 886 families, including 1,552 children.

©Midland Daily News 2005

Wanted: Sharing Tree gifts

Midland Daily News

12/15/2005

Midlanders who took a Sharing Tree tag but have gotten caught up in a holiday rush still have time to return gifts – but not much.

The Volunteer Center coordinating the Sharing Tree has counted about 400 tags and gift requests that have yet to be filled or returned. To catch up, shoppers can get gifts to either the Midland Mall's customer service desk, or to the Volunteer Center office at the Strosacker Building on Main Street by Monday at 5 p.m.

The deadline is an important, since many participating agencies and schools will close early next week. Gifts returned after Monday will not make it to recipients by Christmas.

©Midland Daily News 2005

Christmas concert to benefit food bank

HOMETOWN HEADLINES

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Thursday, December 15, 2005

By Kristin Longley

klongley@flintjournal.com • 810.766.6249

A Christmas benefit concert for the Food Bank of Eastern Michigan will be held at 7 p.m. Dec. 23 at The Machine Shop, 3539 S. Dort Highway.

The concert, held by Food4Music Events, will feature four local artists: Girl Scout Hand Grenade, Diver, Burning Cities and The Hush Children.

Tickets are \$5 in advance and \$6 or nonperishable food items at the door. Door prizes and a 50/50 raffle will be available for those who donate food.

Food4Music is a Canada-based organization which has held many benefits in Vancouver for a local food bank. This is the first time it has held a concert in the United States.

Charity organizer reconsiders, will stay

FENTON TOWNSHIP

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Thursday, December 15, 2005

By Bob Wheaton

bwheaton@flintjournal.com • 810.766.6375

FENTON - Nancy Stockham isn't quitting as the city's unofficial social worker after all.

Stockham said she's reversed her earlier decision to shut down her charity at the end of the year.

"I'm going to go on," Stockham, 74, said Wednesday. "I've changed my mind. I'm so busy and I just can't stand to see people who need food."

For decades, Stockham has provided food and clothing to the needy through a program she runs out of her home. She also organizes an annual Thanksgiving food basket program and the Genesee County Wrap-In, which provides Christmas gifts to the elderly and to needy children.

Stockham announced in September she was quitting after a flap with the city over its decision to end funding for her charity, God Rewards Christian Endeavors, better known as GRACE. She said at the time that part of the reason was the funding cut and part of it was her age.

Paying for her programs remains a concern. "It always is," she said. "I'll just keep praying. It's the best I can do."

The charity had \$50,000 in funding last year, but city funding of \$15,000 ended this year and GRACE's contribution from the United Way was down by \$16,000.

The charity might have to rely more on donations from businesses, Stockham said. The Fenton Area Chamber of Commerce raised more than \$10,000 for GRACE after the funding cuts.

"The city needs her and the community needs her," said Fenton resident Pete Medor, a former councilman. "To have her life-long efforts go away because of a misunderstanding (with the city), I think, would just be a bad thing to happen - just not the way she should step down."

During a City Council meeting in October, Medor repeatedly suggested he didn't think Stockham would really quit, but she insisted she would.

Medor said he remembers his mother knitting hats and scarves for Stockham's charity while listening to Detroit Tigers and Detroit Pistons games on the radio.

Fenton Mayor Sue Osborn said she plans to hold fundraisers for GRACE.

"I was surprised (she decided not to quit), but I'm glad she did," Osborn said. "It's a real void in the community without her."

QUICK TAKE

Nancy Stockham timeline MAY:

Fenton City

Council passes a

budget with no

funding for Nancy

Stockham's charity.

The decision comes

after the city

attorney raises

concerns that

taxpayer funds

shouldn't be used to

support the charity.

SEPTEMBER:

Marlene Eller,

Stockham's

assistant, tells the

City Council that

no one notified

Stockham of the

funding cut. City

Manager Michael

Senyko says he

thought Stockham

was aware that her

funding would be

cut. Two weeks

later, Stockham

announces she is

shutting down the

charity effective at

the end of the year.

DECEMBER:

Stockham says she

has changed her

mind and will

continue to run the

charity.

Lansing State Journal

Letters

December 15, 2005

Pass right-to-work

State Republican lawmakers are trying to push bills that would make welfare even harder to receive. This would make Michigan's most prosperous citizens proud because less of their tax money would go for this.

These citizens include lawmakers who do not realize how Michigan citizens are struggling because of the state's unfriendly business climate. We are having difficulty in attracting new industries because of our high taxes, over-regulation and our union mentality.

I am not anti-union, but I think that we should follow the philosophy of job-creating states and pass "right to work laws"- laws that allow unions, but disallow "closed shops" i.e. mandatory union membership for employees when that workplace is unionized.

Before we pass more anti-welfare legislation in Michigan we must first fix our unemployment problem by attracting well-paying jobs to our state.

Melissa Sue Robinson

Lansing

Editorials

Double Dipping

State should change pension policy for rehires

Detroit Free Press

December 15, 2005

There is nothing illegal about retired state employees returning to state service and collecting both a paycheck and a pension. But it's not a good practice and, as a matter of public policy, ought to be limited.

Rehiring a pensioner may be the most efficient way for a state supervisor to fill a vacancy in a job that puts a premium on experience. These decisions have returned some dedicated, career public servants to the active ranks. But it's a practice that can look like cronyism, and as such undermines public confidence in state government.

This ought to be a concern to state leaders. In times like these and the tougher times surely ahead for Michigan, state government is going to need all the public support it can get. Anybody who isn't getting one paycheck doesn't want to hear about a state employee drawing two.

Beyond that, how often is such a hire simply the easiest solution -- rather than the most economical, or the one that will offer another employee an opportunity to advance and grow? As the Free Press reported Tuesday, 83 state employees also are retirees, receiving two checks. Some states have rules about such things -- for example, suspending pension payments for returnees whose earnings surpass a certain level, or limiting what they can be paid. In Michigan, the only rule is that you have to be gone for 30 days before you can be rehired.

The state actually created a lot of the opportunities for the two-check folks by offering generous early retirements to thousands of workers several years ago to reduce its payroll. Someone should have been thinking at the time about all the experienced hands who would be leaving and whether a policy was needed. At one time, the state had about 60,000 employees; the workforce is now about 48,000, so the number of double dippers is not huge.

The state's two-check situation is not nearly as troubling as some of the sweet pension deals local governments around Michigan have worked out to take care of their own at public expense. Detailed by the Free Press last year, those often involve moving an employee into a better-paying job just before retirement to increase the employee's pension payments, which are based on last salary.

Still, the state's utter absence of rules doesn't look right. There ought to be a way to adjust the system to pay people for working and protect their pensions until they decide they're really done.